

# Wildlife Program

Week of February 13, 2012

## **OUTREACH DIVISION**

### ***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.***



**WildWatchcams – Heroncam:** Two new camera eyes in the tree-tops will soon be sending a streaming video of nesting great blue herons at the Seattle Park and Recreation – Kiwanis Wildlife Reserve.

Chuck Gibilisco worked with Chris Anderson and officials from the conservation group Heron Habitat Helpers and staff from Seattle Parks and Recreation to complete the new installation of a second tree-top camera. The camera will permit increased visual coverage of a portion of the heronry that seems to be hard hit by crow and eagle depredation and disturbance. Heron Habitat Helpers work with WDFW to remotely control the cameras and archive video clips of avian interactions for further study. Two cameras with full remote rotation and zoom capabilities will also increase and extend the public viewing and enjoyment of the

herons. Work agreements are underway with the popular Discovery Visitor Center, operated by Seattle Parks and Recreation, to receive live feed of the nesting herons on a large flat screen TV. Parks staff is also considering development of interpretive displays and programs that highlight the live sounds and video action of the nesting herons.

Chris Anderson is also engaged in discussions with Army Corps of Engineers staff at the nearby Ballard Locks who have expressed an interest in hosting the live video feed of the nearby heron action. Other public education and outreach elements under consideration at various key locations include a series of trailside interpretive signs.



### **Western Governors Association Annual Conference – Wildlife Management Outreach:**

There is a lot of movement in the upcoming Western Governors Association annual conference, points of interest are:

- 1) Potential recreational activities in and near Suncadia, June 9 and 10.

- 2) eBird (Cornell University) and ESRI developing a smart phone application.
- 3) Potential focus on Cle Elum School District outdoor educational activities and Project CAT. Tudor provided the Western Governors Association (WGA) representative proposals for outdoor learning and recreation activities for Governors and their staff at a June 2012 Summit. The proposal described a potential Bioblitz activity where the Governors observe and report fauna with wildlife expert assistance and facilitated by experienced teachers and students from nearby Cle Elum-Roslyn school district.
- 4) Potential resolution on Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies new educational products.

Staff developed a list of birding festivals currently planned, for the 19 states, represented in the Western Governors Association (WGA). Governor Gregoire, as Chair of the WGA, is hosting the annual conference and meeting in Cle Elum this June. The 2012 WGA theme is Get Out West and promotes travel, tourism, recreation, and volunteerism related to the ecological diversity represented by the WGA and its various states. The birding festival list highlights the importance of wildlife viewing and community festivals throughout the WGA states. WDFW staff is working with a contact from Governor Gregoire's Policy Office on the upcoming event.

### ***GOAL 3: USE SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES, DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE.***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Wildlife Outreach Volunteers:** Chandler finalized the CERVIS program for registering volunteers, and forwarded the program to Greg Schirato, Wildlife Program Deputy Assistant, to facilitate a regional manager review. Chandler added a CERVIS administrator to coordinate amphibian egg mass surveys, and has registered over 500 volunteers to date, double the number from the previous week. Regional wildlife managers provided Chandler with feedback on the Volunteer Management Information tracking system CERVIS, and adjustments are currently being made in preparation for a February launch.

## **WILDLIFE DIVERSITY DIVISION**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

**Marbled Murrelet Conservation:** Biologist Steve Desimone began reviewing a draft revision of the Pacific Seabird Group protocol for terrestrial Marbled Murrelet surveys. The revision process is intended to result in a major update of the 2003 protocol. In light of the continued downward population trend, an analysis of survey intensity is being proposed. Steve is the WDFW representative for the Marbled Murrelet Technical Committee that will provide the initial review.

**Habitat Connectivity Project:** The project team is still in the thick of finishing the Phase I Columbia Plateau Connectivity Analysis document. It will be completed Feb. 29, but some of the appendices and associated elements will be finalized over the next few months. We have completed 11 species models, landscape integrity modeling, and multiple products, interpretations, and write-ups based on this large amount of work. The WDFW GIS staff (Brian Cosentino, Brian Hall), is of course exceptional, and in addition to running series of updated

maps, they are providing figures to illustrate specific points. I've attached one map that highlights the border area between Washington and Oregon, and includes the composite species and landscape integrity map, as well as a landsat depiction of the same area.

This week the Wildlife Habitat Connectivity Working Group held the yearly Core Team meeting to take stock of last year's accomplishments, grant deliverables for this year, and to consider other aspects of work for this year that the collaborative connectivity group would like to pursue. Top on the list are finishing the Columbia Plateau analysis, beginning early stages of a transboundary analysis with B.C., setting the stage for future work in other areas of the state, and working on a publication that contrasts and compares focal species and naturalness connectivity analyses approaches at statewide and ecoregional scales of analysis.

Also see TNC's website publicity about the Habitat Connectivity Project:

<http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/washington/washington-room-to-roam.xml>

## **REGION 1**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Gray Wolf Monitoring:** Assistant District Wildlife Biologist Jay Shepherd worked with agency cooperators in deploying additional self-activated cameras in areas of recently reported wolf detections. These efforts included teaming with Habitat Biologist Sandy Dotts to deploy remote cameras in the Empire Creek drainage in the area of Curlew, Washington where continual recent wolf sightings have occurred by several members of the public. Shepherd also spent a day with Todd Foster, U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), deploying cameras and looking at wolf sign within a U.S. Air Force (USAF) survival school winter camp site. Shepherd retrieved one camera deployed near possible wolf sign on the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge. No wolves were detected, however.



**Todd Foster (DOD) looking at wolf tracks within a USAF survival school camera site near Smackout Meadows within GMU 111.**



**Asotin Bighorn Sheep Disease Outbreak:** District Biologist (DB) Wik spent Friday in the field tracking bighorn sheep in the Asotin herd. A ewe that had been sick for 2 weeks was found on mortality in the lower portion of the range. This ewe was retrieved and taken to Washington State University (WSU) with the help of a volunteer. Wik and the volunteer stayed at WSU Friday evening to talk with researcher Tom Besser about the outbreak and the captive disease trials currently ongoing. While there we were able to confirm that ewe had pneumonia. Also, the lab was able to confirm that 3 of 3 ewes tested for *Mycoplasma ovipneumonia* were positive in the Asotin herd. The lab is still processing the results from a ewe that died 2 weeks ago from causes other than pneumonia.





On Monday, DB Wik and Officer Vance recovered a collared bighorn ewe from the Heller Bar area that had been heard on mortality from a telemetry flight. This ewe had been transplanted 10 miles south of here 2 months ago by ODFW. The ewe, along with a few other sheep, found the Black Butte herd, which have historically been one of the sicker herds in Hells Canyon. This ewe was confirmed to have pneumonia. The other 2 collared animals from this transplant in the Heller Bar area are acting sick and will likely die soon.

Assistant DB Vekasy tracked sheep in Asotin Creek bighorn sheep herd to monitor progression of disease outbreak. Observed one collared ewe coughing along with ram lamb in same group, confirmed contagious ecthyma in another collared ewe, 3<sup>rd</sup> collared ewe was on mortality, found to be still alive but in very poor condition. Collared ewe killed by cougar and retrieved week prior was confirmed to have *Mycoplasma ovipneumonia* infection, a bacteria correlated with

pneumonia outbreaks in most western bighorn sheep herds. This is the second Asotin sheep positive for *M. ovipneumonia*, the first having died as a result of pneumonia.

### **Wildlife Areas**

**Chief Joseph Wildlife Area – Trespass Livestock:** Trespass livestock are entering the wildlife area from private property. Our problem is a boundary fence which is old, not on property lines, and difficult to access. Repairs made last year are working well. However, this year, cattle are dropping below our rebuilt fence and slipping through weak fence between rock rims. Cuevas Winegart and Debby Flynn spent just about all of their work week on a solution. David Woodall assisted on Thursday. A helicopter was hired on Thursday to fly three bundles of materials to rim areas as carrying material by hand would have been virtually impossible and extremely time consuming. Manager Dice and enforcement Sergeant Mike Sprecher discussed action that could be taken by enforcement to compel the livestock owner to keep his cows off the wildlife area. Dice phoned the livestock owner on Wednesday and advised him to remove his livestock from the wildlife area and that he would be contacted by enforcement in the near future.



Fence rebuild in rock rims at Chief Joseph Wildlife Area





View of Chief Joseph WLA Buildings from fence repair site.

### **Private Lands/Access**

**Coordinating with USDA Farm Services Agency:** Biologist Merg inquired at the local Farm Services Agency office this week to assist a grower with CRP enrolled in pollinator habitat. Merg also inquired about rumored, recent expansion in Whitman County of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, which in Washington is designed to protect habitat for imperiled populations of salmonids. Habitat for anadromous salmonids is not abundant in Whitman County. Were FSA to designate more riparian habitat in Whitman County to be important to such salmonids, a full suite of terrestrial wildlife species that utilize riparian habitats would benefit, and owners of that riparian habitat would profit by it.

### ***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.***

### **Wildlife Management**

**Landowner Hunting Permit Program Spokane County:** Biologists Ferguson and Atamian met with Bob Haase, Spokane County rancher who had expressed interest in the LHP program at the Selkirk Elk Herd Plan public meeting. We had an extensive conversation discussing the program, Master Hunter (MH) season changes, hunting on the ranch, previous year's harvest, etc. With the current proposal to keep the MH general December season Mr. Haase likely will not pursue the LHP. Biologist Ferguson talked with John Bruce regarding the proposed change to the Master Hunter seasons and its impact on the proposed LHP season. As a result changes were made to the LHP season to adjust it not to overlap with the MH general season. Ferguson also worked on getting new maps for the LHP area after receiving updates/increases to the parcels.

## **REGION 2**

**Region 2 – Okanogan, Douglas, Chelan, Grant and Adams Counties**

**Regional Wildlife Program Manager: Matt Monda**

### **DISTRICT BIOLOGISTS**

**District 5: Grant / Adams District - Rich Finger / Brock Hoenes**

**Weekender Opportunities:** Waterfowl numbers have greatly increased on the Columbia Plateau with the warming weather. Large numbers of field feeding ducks can be observed throughout the basin.

### ***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.***

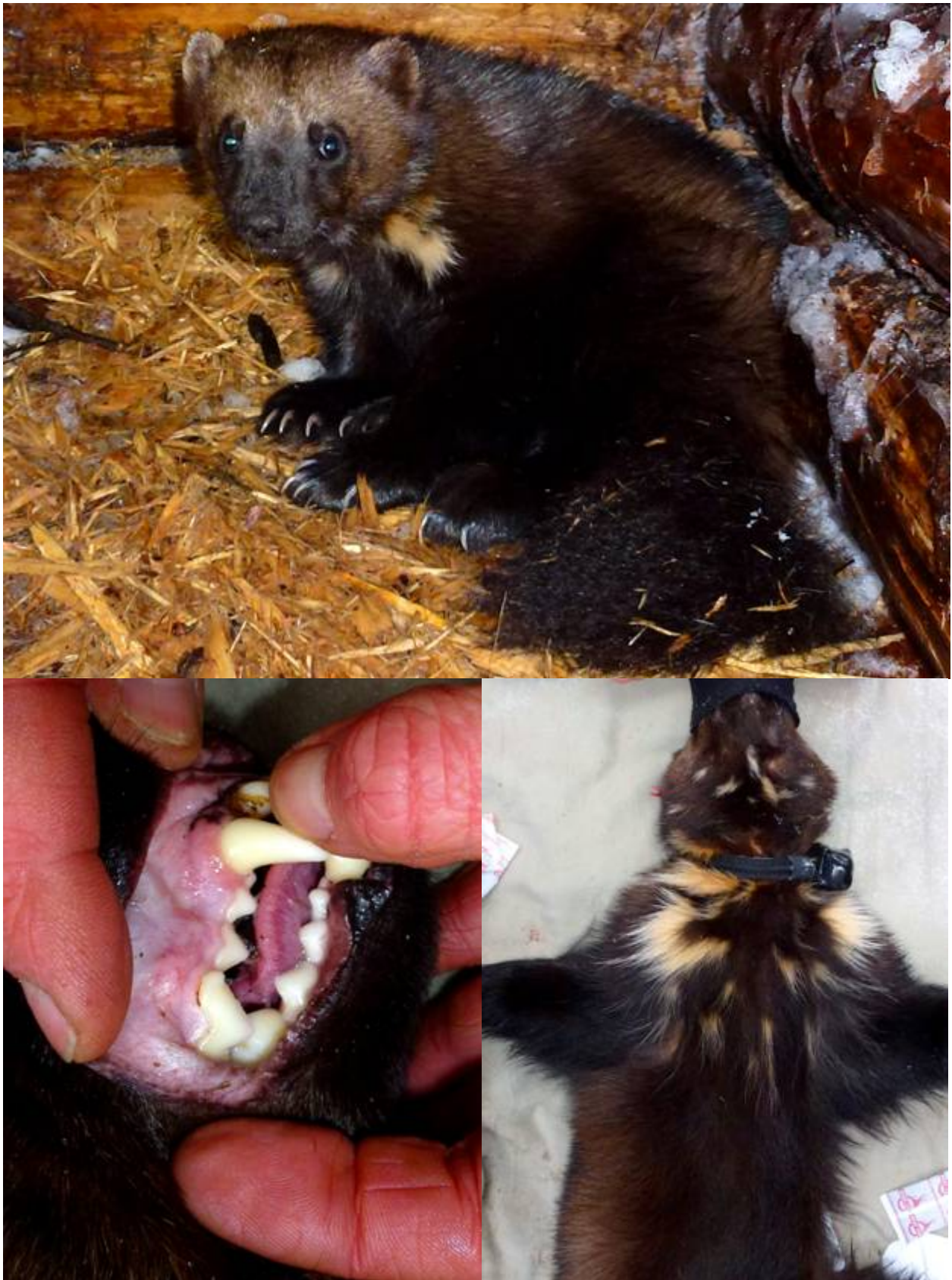
**Middle Crab Creek Habitat Enhancement:** Biologist Finger and Wildlife Area Manager Fitzgerald attended a meeting with Michael Lesky from Bureau of Reclamation at the northern end of the Gloyd Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area to discuss restoration of the site to a dense nesting cover site for upland birds and waterfowl. Also discussed was the potential to create an irrigated nursery for which we could grow willow and red osier dogwood to supply cuttings which would be installed during fall 2013 or 2014 and beyond, depending on when Supplemental Feed water begins to flow through the system. To prepare the fields for dense nesting cover, Leske plans to grow round-up ready canola for 2 years to reduce current weed issues on site. Doing so should result in considerable improvement to future planting efforts.

**District 6: Okanogan District - Scott Fitkin / Jeff Heinlen**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

**North Cascades Wolverine Research Project:** Apparently wolverines only like to get captured on busy weekends. Wildlife biologists Fitkin, Heinlen, and USFS staff successfully immobilized and collared the third wolverine of the season. This particular individual turned out to be Xena, an adult female at least 6-7 years old that we hadn't handled since 2007. Xena is in fine health and feistier than ever, doing her warrior-princess title justice (see attached video). Although she is not pregnant, it appeared she has had kits in the past. The data from this animal will be particularly interesting, since we will be able to compare her territory and movements now as an established matriarch, with her 2007 exploits as a young female just beginning adulthood.





*Wolverine – Xena, teeth, and chest blaze*

**North Cascades Lynx Research Project:** All week long we've had an adult male lynx sabotaging our trap line. He has entered a trap and removed the bait without setting it off, has

triggered two traps that had doors fail to close completely and thus escaped, has torn a hole through the back of one trap and removed the bait, and finally got caught in a trap but then tore a hole in the side and walked free. Needless to say, we are modifying our traps and trying alternate techniques this coming week. We're anxious to successfully capture and collect data on this animal since he is likely one of the dominant males in our study area.

## **District 7: Chelan / Douglas District – David Volsen / Jon Gallie**

**Weekender Opportunities:** Bald eagles are concentrated along the Columbia River and make for easy view opportunities. Golden eagle pairs are on their territories in February and early March. Look for pairs of birds soaring together. Early migrant passerines birds are showing up in warmer habitats. These birds are mostly short-distance migrants.

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

**Bighorn Sheep:** Biologist Volsen removed the cape, head, and horns from an adult male bighorn sheep that was euthanized by Officer Oswald. The ram was put down when it was discovered to have a severe fracture and after it was observed falling down a steep talus slope. The ram was one of the original translocated animals from Chelan Butte and was 9 years of age.

## **SPECIES RECOVERY**

### **Pygmy Rabbit Recovery - Penny Becker**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

**Pygmy Rabbit Husbandry:** Research Scientist Becker spent time on Sagebrush Flat wildlife area monitoring and providing supplemental feed to the pygmy rabbits in large enclosures. No mortalities have occurred in the last five weeks.

**Informal Rabbit Burrow Searches:** Research Scientist Becker conducted an informal survey of possible burrows on Sagebrush Flat WLA in an attempt to find additional recent signs of rabbits that were released last spring and to also collect additional fecal pellets from a known pygmy rabbit burrow. Semi-fresh pellets were collected from a new burrow site (Photos below) approximately 500 feet away from the other confirmed burrow (Photos below). The genotype produced from the new pellets will be compared to the pellets from the other burrow to determine if one or multiple individuals are living in that vicinity.







*Confirmed pygmy rabbit burrow on the edge of a firebreak with many semi-fresh pellets at the entrance.*

*New burrow found 2/15 with many semi-fresh pellets at the entrance.*



**Non-invasive Fecal Sampling:** Additional fecal and tissue samples are being sent to the University of Idaho laboratory to complete individual identification analyses. Using fecal samples, a genotype of the rabbits found on Sagebrush Flat during surveys will be produced and then compared with the genotypes from tissues of all released individuals. This will confirm which individuals have survived reintroduction and later, which individuals successfully breed.

**Spring Translocation Preparation:** Research Scientist Becker focused most of her time this week planning for trapping in other range states in March. The trapping team will head to Utah and Nevada March 6-22.

## **WILDLIFE AREAS**

**Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Complex – Greg Fitzgerald / Brian Cole / Roger Nelson**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

**Supplemental Feed Route Habitat Enhancements:** Manager Greg Fitzgerald met with District Wildlife Biologist Rich Finger and Natural Resource Specialist Mike Lesky of the US Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) on a parcel of farm ground recently purchased by BOR in support of the Supplemental Feed Route (SFR). Options were discussed on how best to convert the old hay fields to desirable habitat. With irrigation water available, good soils and the SFR flowing through a portion of the fields, excellent opportunities exist to develop duck nesting, riparian and seasonally flooded off-channel pond habitats. BOR intends to develop the habitat with WDFW providing technical advice.

### ***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.***



**Frenchman Regulated Access Area:** Assistant Manager Brian Cole finished spreading grass straw mulch over the newly seeded berms and disturbed areas in the Frenchman Regulated Access Area. The mulch will help hold seed and retain soil moisture against the normal spring winds. Approximately 2,800 pounds of mulch were spread over approximately 1 mile of berms and unstable sands.



Mulching

***GOAL 3: USE SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES, DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE.***

**Frenchman Coulee Rock Climbers:** Manager Fitzgerald and Regional Wildlife Program Manager Matt Monda met with remote site waste management consultant Geoff Hill of Crescent Moon Consulting, Sarah Krueger of The Mountaineers climbing club, Eddie Espinosa of the American Alpine Club, and Jeremy Parks of the Washington Climbers Coalition at the Frenchman Coulee climbing area to discuss options for providing some sort of toilet facilities. The early spring warm up and towering cliffs of Frenchman Coulee has increasingly attracted rock climbers, the proximity to The Gorge Concert Venue attracts summer concert-goers for camping, and easy access via the Old Vantage Highway tends to attract way too many vandals. The Columbia Basin Wildlife Area (CBWA) had provided portable outhouses in the past, but due to vandalism, trash, and the distance involved, the service vendor refused to continue providing maintenance of the outhouses. It was agreed that the interested user groups would bring a proposal forward for approval, the challenges to installing a vault toilet include on-going vandalism, bedrock at the surface and an area rich in cultural resources.



The Feathers



Climber's Trail



#### ***GOAL 4: MAINTAIN A HIGHLY SKILLED AND MOTIVATED WORKFORCE.***

**Herbicide Application:** With recent wet, warm weather driving the frost out of the ground conditions are prime for residual herbicide applications to roads and parking areas on the CBWA. Vegetation Management Specialist Roger Nelson continued the annual treatment. The residual herbicide needs some moisture to carry it onto the soil surface and prevent germination of annual weed seeds such as Russian thistle and kochia, keeping the roads and parking areas clean and reducing the possibility of wildfires. Despite equipment problems, Nelson has sprayed 72 acres so far in the Potholes Reservoir, Winchester Lake, Desert, Quincy Lakes, and Seep Lakes units.

#### **Scotch Creek Wildlife Area Complex - Jim Olson / Brian DuPont / Mike Nelson**

##### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

**Pogue Mountain Timber Thinning:** Biologist Dupont monitored the Pogue Mtn. project with this the final week of harvest. Harvesting equipment was removed by the contractor this week, while the loader and trucking continues. Decked logs are being hauled this week to mills in Omak, Oroville, and Kettle Falls. County road restrictions were initiated this week and require hauling prior to 10am only. All logs should be removed by Monday, February 20.

**Great Grey Owl (GGO):** Biologist Dupont purchased a full bunk of 1"x12"x6' rough cut cedar and has completed construction on 10 Owl nesting platforms. These platforms will be installed early this spring on the Chesaw unit in hopes of being detected and used by the GGO that we discovered this past year in that forest.

##### ***GOAL 3: USE SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES, DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE.***

**Trail Interpretive Signs:** Manager Olson worked on interpretive sign material for the trailheads, and 3 homesteads along the Coulee Creek trail route. Drafts of the 5 signs were sent to Peggy Ushakoff in Olympia for help with final design and printing. Three will include historic pictures of the homesteading days in the Scotch Creek Basin.

**Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Complex – Wildlife Area Units:** Sinlahekin, Driscoll Island, Chiliwist, Carter Mountain and Horse Spring Coulee and Buzzard Lake.

**Manager:** Dale Swedberg

**Assistant:** Justin Haug

**Weekender Opportunities:** Bird watching – most common wintertime birds, e.g., Bird watching opportunities include species previously listed in weekly reports - Red-tailed hawks, pileated woodpeckers, ring-necked pheasant, American goldfinches (see photo), pine grosbeak (see photo), American robin, northern shrike, northern harriers, redpolls, trumpeter swans, Bohemian waxwings, Clark's nutcrackers, black-capped chickadees, northern flicker - red-shafted variety, sharp-shinned hawk (see photo), and hooded mergansers. A few early migrants are appearing such as western bluebirds (see photo) which were heard and red-winged blackbirds that were seen.





*American Goldfinches*



*Pine Grosbeak*



*Sharp-shinned Hawk*

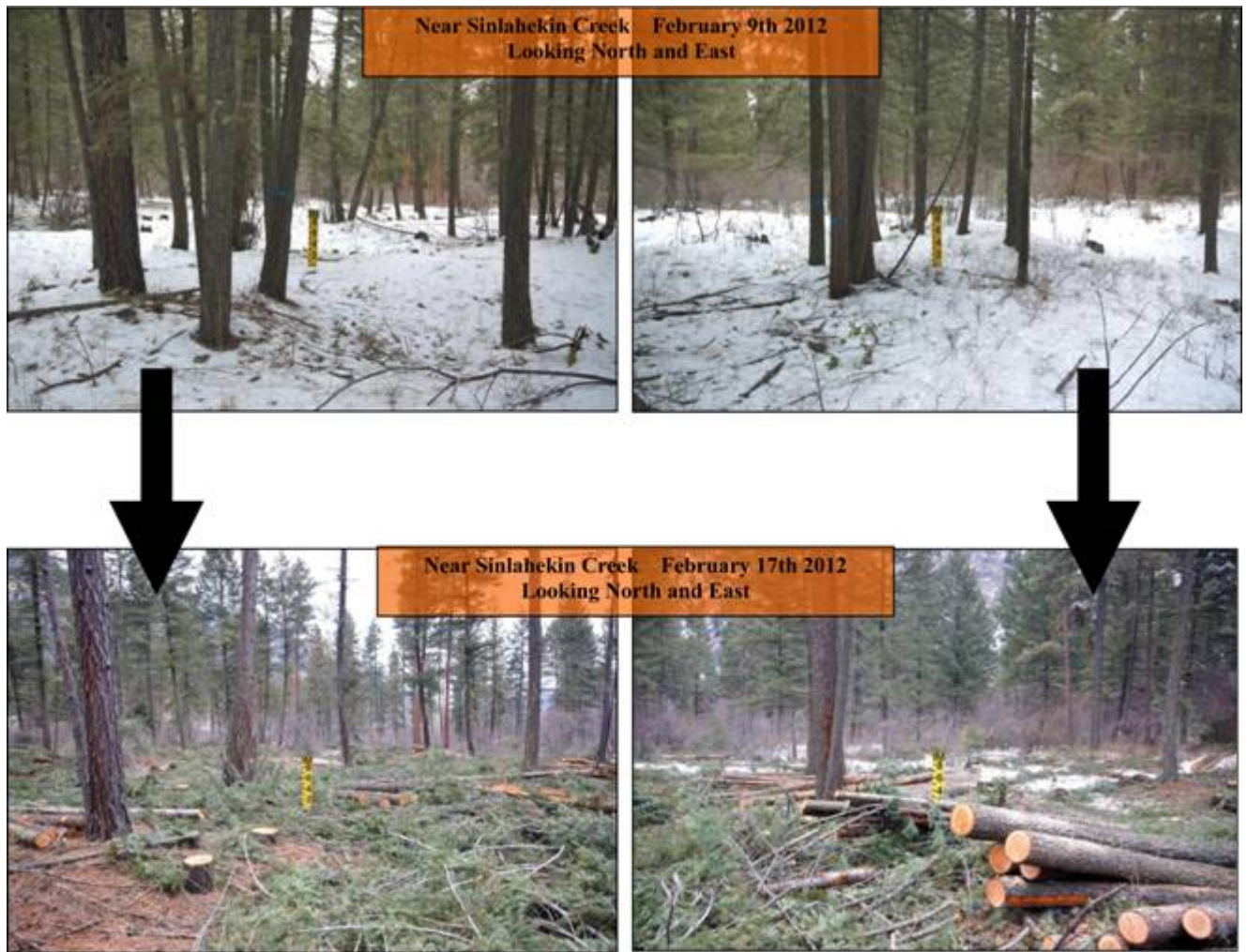


*Western Bluebirds*

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Machine Thinning - Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Project (SERP) Phase 1 & 2:**

Machine thinning continued in the Sinlahekin Creek alluvial fan area after a shut down due to warmer weather. See before and after thinning photo pairs below.



- Assistant manager Haug met with field staff and contractors working on the Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Project (SERP) to check on progress and address issues regarding the timber harvest. The progress has been hampered by road restrictions brought on by warming temperatures, making harvesting/hauling impossible in the thawing conditions. Due to County Road Restrictions, hauling of timber has been restricted to early morning hours and harvesting has ceased until current cut-logs are off the landscape.

***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.***

**Volunteer – Bluebird Nest Box Cleaning:** Assistant manager Haug met with Professor Kathleen Johnson of Wenatchee Valley Collage – Omak and two students as they assisted with the annual cleaning of bluebird nest boxes on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area. The group cleaned a large swath of boxes and documented type of nest(s), mortalities, condition of the box, etc. Their continued assistance with this project is greatly appreciated!





**PRIVATE LANDS - John Cotton / Eric Braaten / JoAnn Wisniewski**

***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

**2012 Douglas County SAFE Signup:** There are still acres available in the State Areas for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE)/ Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) project. For the remaining acres we are going to personally contact landowners with expiring CRP that is located close to an active lek. Biologist Wisniewski (with the assistance of Tom Owens) completed the creation of a contact list of landowners with expiring CRP, ranked by distance to lek. Private Lands Biologist Braaten and Cotton assisted Farm Service Agency (FSA) with contacting landowners about available SAFE acres in Douglas County. A total of 40 landowners were contacted to inform them about the opportunity to sign up their (CRP) tracts that expire in September 2012 into SAFE. CRP tracts were selected on their proximity to active Sage and Sharp-tailed grouse leks. Biologist Wisniewski continued to try and correlate FSA's contract records with our working data. We received the last minute changes to farm tract acreages from FSA and are now incorporating those changes into the ArcMap project. Unfortunately this also means the contract documents will also need to be revised and resubmitted.



## **REGION 3**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Sage-grouse:** District Wildlife Biologist Mike Livingston coordinated and participated in a conference call with WDFW's Mike Schroeder, Derek Stinson and Michael Atamian to discuss the Army's study plan to capture and attach radio transmitters to sage-grouse at the Yakima Training Center. Based on the results of the conference call, Livingston wrote and sent a response to the Army suggesting a scaled down version of the study with the main objective to prepare for a translocation effort in 2013.

**Winter Weather:** Cold mornings in the 20's and with several sunny days in the 40's. A couple of snow storms came through with no new accumulation. Snow continues to melt and hillsides are opening up. Elk are ranging off the feed sites daily and coming back at feeding time. Cheat grass is beginning to green up and emerge.

Weather for the coming week is going to be mild with lows around freezing and highs in the upper 40's and 50's. No new precipitation is expected.

Elk are in good condition, with counts on the feed sites holding steady.

## **REGION 4**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**WDFW-Woodland Park Zoo Citizen Science Amphibian Monitoring:** Biologist Anderson met with Seattle Parks and Recreation staff and Woodland Park Zoo staff at the site of the upcoming field practice survey for volunteers. Seattle Parks will provide interpretation on amphibian use and ecology; history of the park and wetland site; urban wetlands and degradation issues; and the management needs related to maintaining functional wetlands in urbanized areas, etc. Woodland Park Zoo and WDFW will lead volunteers through practice amphibian egg mass survey efforts. We plan to have around three-quarters (40-50) of current volunteer participants based on interest shown in the previous classroom training.

**Great Blue Heron Management Assistance to city of Seattle:** Biologist Anderson continued to provide assistance to ongoing heron management efforts in Seattle, as well as review new site-specific management plan requests and send out management plan recommendations for specific projects.

This included working with three single-family build projects in Seattle to allow for construction until herons were staging regularly and/or in the colony areas, via monitoring by their project contract biologist and area Heron Habitat Helpers volunteers. Anderson worked with the project leads and Seattle to finalize or weatherize projects over the past month and now phased work out due to heron presence ramping up last week. Herons are now showing courtship behavior this week and the projects are now conducting project phasing which involves interior rather than exterior work.

More information on WDFW Priority Habitats and Species, which are recommended by WDFW for consideration at the local government level (such as Great Blue Herons, Bald Eagles, Pileated Woodpeckers and more) can be found at: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/phs/>.

**Swan Mortality and Morbidity Study:** The swan project is beginning to wind down with fewer carcasses being reported and/or collected. Technician Lapsansky and Volunteer Smith continued to check in with the hotline and conduct driving surveys. Biologist DeBruyn corresponded with the USGS Wildlife Health Center in Madison Wisconsin regarding the Skagit County “hot spot”, so far USFS veterinary staff have not identified cause of death for the swans collected from this site.

**March Point Heron Colony:** Biologist DeBruyn worked on an ongoing project to maintain a wildlife camera at a Heron colony at March point. The project is a joint effort between WDFW, Skagit Land Trust, and Padilla Bay Interpretive Center.

### **Wildlife Areas**

**Cherry Valley Waterwheel Creek and Fish Passage Project:** Manager Paulson attended a project coordination meeting with Wild Fish Conservancy and WDFW. This summer the northeast section of Cherry Valley will be under construction for the Waterwheel Creek project. During the Waterwheel Creek construction project, a Fish Passage project will be constructed in the southwest section of Cherry Valley.

### **Private Lands/Access**

**Private Lands Non-Game Viewing Sites:** Biologist Roozen met in preparation for the development of potential private lands wildlife viewing program. The private lands program in Region 4 hopes to have a few sites established by the spring of this year. Biologist Roozen and technician Otto attended a Wild Whatcom Walks seminar, which was focused on swans at Tennant Lake. Roozen and Otto introduced the idea of a new watchable wildlife program to the group and fielded questions from several Audubon Society Members.

## ***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.***

### **Wildlife Management**

**Nooksack Elk Herd Trap and Collar Project:** Biologists Danilson spent time afield with tribal biologists and technicians baiting, checking and relocating Clover traps. One cow elk was trapped, radio collared and successfully released on February 14. Elk activity at several baiting sites has slowed down, but these continue to be monitored at least once/day.

**Snow Goose Rocket Net Capture:** Biologists Danilson and Roozen conferred with Waterfowl Section Manager Kraege, Technician Otto and visiting Russian biologist Vasiliy Baranyuk regarding upcoming snow goose capture efforts. Several components of this project should fall into place this week that could facilitate rocket net capture before the end of the week. A successful early spring capture will allow District 14 staff to get neck collars out into the Skagit-Fraser overwintering snow goose population prior to return migration. This is the initial element of a more comprehensive project to improve our understanding of local snow goose movements, distribution, and habitat utilization.

**Snow Goose Hunting Season Wrap Up:** Biologists Danilson and Roozen and Technician Otto met with Enforcement personnel to provide and receive feedback regarding the 2011-2012 snow goose season. With the exception of a four incidents of overharvest and other minor infractions, all agreed that the season was a success. Enforcement staff expressed appreciation for the cooperation from the private lands quality hunt staff from District 14 where applicable.

### **Wildlife Areas**

**Cherry Valley Beaver Trap Incident:** Manager Paulson was informed that there was an incident at Cherry Valley with a dog getting his leg caught in an illegal beaver trap. Manager Paulson got in contact with WDFW Enforcement Officer Sergeant Chandler. The two walked the property to look for any other signs of trapping. While no other traps were found, Sergeant Chandler is investigating the incident.

**Intalco Unit:** Wildlife Area Manager Kessler coordinated with the Custer Sportsmen's Club on the Archery Course on the Intalco Unit. They plan to work the next few weekends on improving the course, getting it ready for opening on March 17<sup>th</sup>.

**British Petroleum Unit:** Wildlife Area Manager Kessler and Wildlife Agent Ryan Valentine met with BP Security to review how the hunting season went this year. BP felt the season went very well with no real problems during the season. We will be resigning the access agreement with BP very soon. Also discussed was the Duck Stamp funds they will receive for the 20 acres of barley they planted this year. They will try to get 40 acres planted this coming year.

### **Private Lands/Access**

**Waterfowl Quality Hunt Programs:** Technicians Otto and Deyo continued Waterfowl and Snow Goose Quality Hunt Program unit removal and site cleanup. Biologist Roozen and technician Otto continued to meet with partner landowners to finalize payment documents and discuss the program's successes and failures.

Biologist Roozen continued to explore potential private land deer hunting opportunities on Whidbey Island. Roozen also continued with a search to find new land/opportunities for the Western Washington Pheasant Release Program.

## ***GOAL 3: USE SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES, DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE.***

### **Wildlife Management**

**Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary:** Biologist Anderson worked on Backyard requests. Anderson also discussed data needs and provided QA/QC corrections to National Wildlife Federation and Woodland Park Zoo for our collaborative WDFW-National Wildlife Federation-Northwest Zoo and Aquarium Alliance joint certification option, related data, and resulting mailings to participants.

### **Wildlife Areas**

**Crescent Lake Parking Lot Maintenance Project:** Manager Paulson and Access Manager Hacker cleared the south parking lots of Crescent Lake. View of the parking lot from the road was blocked by trees. Behind the trees were areas of vandalism and trash dumping. Some trees



were pulled out, while some of the taller trees were limbed up. Some of the downed trees by the lake were pulled out and cut up. All limbs will be chipped.

**Tennant Lake Unit:** Wildlife Area Manager Kessler and volunteers worked repeatedly to remove beaver dams on the south end of Tennant Lake to get the lake water level to drop. The lake water level went down by the end of the week, but with the latest rainfall, it is right back up to where it started. More work will need to be done later this week.

**Skagit Headquarters/Wiley Slough:** Skagit Wildlife Area Manager Belinda Schuster reviewed and provided comments on interpretative sign proposal for Wiley Slough Estuary Restoration project. Proposal sent to members of Wiley Adaptive Management team for comments and suggestions.

#### ***GOAL 4: MAINTAIN A HIGHLY SKILLED AND MOTIVATED WORKFORCE.***

##### **Wildlife Areas**

**Skagit Wildlife Area Headquarters:** Natural Resource Specialist Greg Meis began work this week at the Skagit Wildlife Area. The new employee checklist is being completed and field visits begin next week.

## **REGION 5**

#### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

##### **Wildlife Management**

**Western Pond Turtles:** Biologist Anderson met with Skamania County weed control staff to discuss habitat improvement projects for western pond turtles in the Columbia River Gorge. Skamania County has been assisting WDFW and the USFS with weed control efforts on USFS and private lands associated with habitat improvement projects over the past few years. In 2012 plans are to treat an additional 10 acres of upland habitat primarily on private lands associated with the Skamania County turtle population.

Biologist Anderson conducted a site visit to the Sondino Unit of the Klickitat Wildlife Area in Klickitat County to prepare for a 5 acre Ponderosa pine thinning project to enhance western pond turtle nesting habitat and release Oregon white oak habitat. This habitat improvement effort will be the final project funded by Bonneville Power Administration money for this fiscal year ending in February.

#### ***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.***

##### **Wildlife Management**

**Mt. St. Helens Elk Herd Study:** In a 3-day effort spanning February 13-15, WDFW conducted a successful elk capture operation in Game Management Units 522 (Loo-Wit), 524 (Margaret), 556 (Toutle), 550 (Coweeman), and 520 (Winston). Thirty elk (22 cows and 8 branch-antlered bulls) were captured by helicopter darting. Members of the capture team included Statewide Deer and Elk Specialist McCorquodale, District Wildlife Biologist Miller, Pilot Jess Hagerman of Northwest Helicopters, Rachel Cook of NCASI (National Council for Air and Stream Improvement), contracted veterinarian Joe Gaydos, and Assistant District Wildlife Biologists

Bergh and Holman. In testament to the skill of the team, no elk were injured or unaccounted for during the operation.

The captured elk were outfitted with radio-transmitters and ear tags. Additionally, blood and tooth samples were collected from each animal, body conditions were evaluated, and all females were checked for pregnancy and lactation status. This work represents a continuation of the Mt. St. Helens Elk Herd Study. The Study is designed to develop an accurate means of quantifying the elk population, assessing nutritional status, and shedding light on habitat use and availability. As an aside, the Study provides an opportunity to evaluate the prevalence of hoof-rot in the St. Helens elk population. Unfortunately this condition seems to be spreading eastward into the higher elevation portion of the herd area as several animals were encountered with the condition and many more were observed from the air. Please see the attached photos from the capture effort. Thanks to all those who participated.



Mt. St Helens Elk capture 2012

**Region 5 Elk:** Biologist Anderson responded to several hunter calls about a variety of issues including elk damage in western Klickitat County, RMEF projects on USFS lands, and regulations for the 2012 hunting season.

## **Private Lands/Access**

**St. Helens Land Access Program:** Program Manager Jonker, Biologist Stephens, and Technician Pyzik hosted an awards and thank you luncheon for the 47 volunteers who helped implement a safe and successful program this year facilitating weekday motorized access to 263,000 acres on Weyerhaeuser property in GMUs 520, 524, 550, & 556. Volunteers shared stories, provided feedback about the program, and enjoyed the opportunity to connect with each other as well as staff from Weyerhaeuser and WDFW on a variety of topics. Bob's Sporting Goods and Weyerhaeuser donated Bob's Sporting Goods gift certificates for the volunteers to thank them in this cooperative effort.

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## **Winter Conditions:**

### **D-10 & MSHWA Winter Conditions:**

**Past Weather:** November temperatures were below normal and precipitation was slightly above average. Snow accumulated in mid and low elevations early in the month but was later melted off by a major warm rainstorm. Most of the month of December was unusually dry with below normal temperatures except the last week, which was warm and wet. The first half of January was mild with relatively warm and dry conditions but was followed by a mid-month storm with significant low elevation snow and valley accumulations. The latter part of the month was relatively normal with occasional rain and snow elevations generally above 2500 feet. February began with over a week of almost spring like temperatures and very little precipitation. The past week was cool and wet with moderate amounts of mid-elevation snow.

**Short-Term Forecast:** Weather over the next week is expected to be cool and wet. Valley temperatures will range from the low 30's to mid 40's. Snow levels should range from about 1000 to 4500 feet. The 6-10 and 8-14 day outlooks suggest below normal temperatures and normal amounts of precipitation.

**Long-Term Forecast:** Colder and wetter than normal through March and potentially into April.

**Habitat:** Currently snow is having little impact on forage availability below 3,000 feet but this could change over the next several days. So far this winter observations in the most critical wintering areas indicate that desirable forages have been only moderately utilized.

**Snow Depths:** Still little snow in the lower elevations. Snowpack is 82% of average in the Southwest Cascades. See spreadsheet below for detailed information ([20Feb2012-MSH\\_Sno-Depth.pdf](#)).

**Animal Concentrations:** No unusual concentrations noted to date. Counts on the Mudflow Unit Survey area remain low. 120 elk were on the Mudflow monitoring area during the February count. Previous counts include 176 elk January 3, 2012 and 116 elk on December 5, 2011.

**Animal Condition:** To date only a very few animals have been seen that appeared to be in relatively poor body condition. During elk captures last week, several elk were observed with symptoms of hoof rot. None observed in severe decline that could be linked to winter conditions.

**Mortality:** No new observations reported.



**Public Contacts:** None to report related to winter conditions.

*The public is reminded that the Mudflow Unit of the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area lying East of a line defined by Hoffstadt Creek, The North Fork Toutle and Deer Creek is closed to public access through April 30 to minimize disturbance and associated energy demands on elk wintering there.*

### **District 9: Winter Conditions**

**Past Weather:** The winter continues to be mild except for the late January snow and ice storm.

**Weather This week:** The weather this week continues to be moderate with some colder temperatures, but below normal precipitation. Some new snow is reported at higher elevations but nothing to effectively change current conditions.

**Winter Severity:** There is still little concern for the overall severity of the winter conditions on big game populations in Skamania County and the western portion of Klickitat County. These conditions could change with additional snow throughout the winter. Until recently, the winter severity has been minimal on big game.

**Habitat:** The Klickitat Wildlife Area is mostly free of snow and most all winter habitats are available. In the eastern part of the County all winter range is open and habitat is in good condition. In Skamania County snow conditions are about at or below average for this time of year and conditions have improved for big game movement from the crust and ice or two weeks ago.

**Animal Concentrations:** A few small elk herds are reported around Trout lake and the Glenwood Valley, but no concentrations of concern based on winter conditions.

**Animal Condition:** Deer and elk appear to still be in good condition to date

**Mortality:** None documented this week.

**Public Contacts:** No weather related concerns raised by the public this week. No calls this winter for information on winter feeding.

## **REGION 6**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Lower Dungeness:** North Olympic Land Trust (NOLT), a WDFW partner in conservation of wildlife habitats in Clallam County, has secured a 50 acre parcel of farmland within the Dungeness Basin. The leader of this effort is John Willits, a retired professor from the local college, who owns many acres of key wetland habitat in the Dungeness Basin. John has brought NOLT into the mix to assure habitat will continue to be available for the much needed inland forage component of the wintering waterfowl diet. John was quick to inform Biologist McMillan of this successful purchase, and is now seeking partnership in managing the property to provide wintering waterfowl habitat. John noted this would need to proceed without hunting,

but was quick to suggest this as a logical location for Watchable Wildlife. It is very possible to be able to attract swans into this field, and to create a watchable wildlife opportunity.

### **Wildlife Areas**

**Wynoochee Mitigation:** Manager Gerchak and Assistant Manager Gallegos finalized and submitted the 2011 Wynoochee Report to Tacoma Public Utilities. The 2011 season provided substantial challenges to the project due to the extremely wet spring which continued throughout the early summer. Nonetheless, all field work associated with this project was completed and visual observations throughout the fall and winter have shown vigorous growth in each of the units. The area is approximately 1030 acres with about 250 acres cleared and seeded into elk forage.

Fields of this nature provide a year round source of nutrition for elk in a heavily managed forestland environment. Managed forestlands throughout this portion of the southern Olympics vary in their nutritional values due to timber age and understory vegetative qualities that present. These managed fields produce roughly 100 times the nutritional quality that is present in similar acreage habitats adjacent to the project as displayed by the Wynoochee Study conducted by Lopez, et al.

The Wynoochee Mitigation project continues to provide optimum forage quantity and quality. This managed forage area sets the bar for forage mitigation projects throughout the northwest. The knowledge of field, vegetative, and soil conditions inherent within the management scheme is un-matched by other forage projects based on the amount of time and experience that has been accumulated since the project inception. WDFW will continue its efforts in managing the mitigation throughout 2011 and for the remainder of the FERC license requirements and looks forward to working with Tacoma Public Utilities throughout the duration of this project.



***GOAL 3: USE SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES, DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE.***

**Wildlife Areas**

**CHEHALIS WILDLIFE AREA EXPANSION**

The final report for the Osgood small NAWCA was completed. All grant funds obtained through this small NAWCA grant were utilized to support the Osgood fee-title acquisition of 77.9 acres. This property abuts the Chehalis Wildlife Area and extends the WDFW ownership from 530 acres to 607.9 acres. The purchased parcels contain 45 acres of palustrine emergent (PEM) wetlands that are connected to protected wetlands within the Chehalis Wildlife Area. The Chehalis Wildlife Area contains 363 acres of protected PEM wetlands. Acquisition of these 45 acres has increased the amount of protected wetlands by 12% to 408 acres of connected wetlands in this important migratory corridor. The surrounding uplands comprise about 32.7 acres and will function as a buffer from development and/or harmful agricultural practices. All of the NRCS planned restoration activities associated with the Wetland Reserve Program are pending permit approval and are likely to occur in 2012-2013. The Washington Waterfowl Association will assist in the demolition of degraded farm facilities on the purchased parcels during the spring/summer of 2012.

